

### Peru School (K-8)



### Description:

Peru, (population 1,515) is the most rural of the individual school communities evaluated in this study. Located approximately 40 miles northwest of Augusta in Oxford County, the town is bisected by the primary transportation corridors of Maine Route 108 and an active freight line owned by Maine Central Railroad.

The Peru Elementary School, an independent school that serves only the municipality of Peru, is located at 100 Main Street in West Peru – a village district approximately five miles west of the current Town Hall and Grange Hall. The Main Street corridor serves as a town center with post office, churches, clustered housing and grocery stores. Main Street continues across the Androscoggin River to Dixfield that serves as a retail/service center. The school is located approximately 100 yards from the intersection of Main Street and Route 108. It features an original school building and additional buildings and recreational fields, which are actively used by the residents of the Town.

Approximately 200 students attend grades K-8 at the school. Although a rural town, a high percentage of the students live in close proximity to the school. With the exception of the need for crossing Route 108, many of these students can access the school via low volume roads; however, truck traffic on some of these roads is a concern. The school bus will pick up all students although the superintendent would like to promote walking for those who live closest to the school.

### Surveys:

Eighty-one completed Safe Ways to School surveys were received from Peru School in fall 2001, representing just under a 50% percent response rate. With the exception of responses from 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, nearly all (84 percent) of the surveys were completed by parents.



**Main Street from school towards  
Route 108**



**Main Street - No paved shoulders or lane  
markings in the vicinity of the school.**



**Main Street in West Peru Village  
Area west of school**



90-degree parking on Main Street in front of the school.



The Main Street/Route 108 intersection is characterized by high traffic volumes and speeds. The edge of roadway is not clearly defined.

**Student Proximity (home-school) Peru Elementary School**

Within 1 mile	Within 3 miles	Within 5 miles	> 5 miles
29%	48%	73%	22%

**Student Regular Mode of Access to Peru Elementary School<sup>1</sup>**

Walk	Bicycle	School Bus	Private Auto	Carpool
5%	3%	76%	7%	0%

Over one quarter of Peru respondents stated that they could reasonably bike or walk to school in spring and fall. If grades 3 and up are looked at separately, over 9 percent of the students currently walk or bike at least once a week during spring and fall. The majority of Peru students travel to and from school on a school bus. While only 5 percent of students walk and 3 percent of students bike to school every fall weekday, 13 percent walk or bike to school 1 to 4 days per week in the fall.

The most common reasons cited among all grades for students not bicycling or walking to school are:

- too far to walk
- sidewalks are not adequate
- traffic is too heavy

<sup>1</sup> Results for those who stated they travel by each mode five days per week. Totals add to 91 percent. The remaining 9 percent travel to school via different modes during each week.



Doloff Street neighborhood



Doloff Street and Mexico Road

Fifty-three (53) percent of respondents (parents) are concerned about traffic safety along the routes to the Peru School. Seventy (70) percent of parents do not allow their children to bicycle or walk to the school. Very few parents feel comfortable with K-2 students walking or biking to school under any circumstances. However, among 6-8 grade students only forty-one (41%) of students are not allowed to walk or bicycle to school.

The School Superintendent noted speeding and frequent gravel trucks as problems on Main Street at and near the school. The fall 2001 survey confirmed this, with 'traffic too fast' cited as the most common reason students do not walk or bike to school. Other respondents cited the lack of sidewalks and shoulders on Main Street as well as blind spots along the corridor. The Pleasant Street bridge was also cited as traffic safety concern.

Respondents noted the construction of sidewalks and bike paths or paved shoulders as the improvements most likely to influence them to encourage bicycle and pedestrian use. Other changes include less/slower traffic and someone (students or parents) to walk and bike with their children.

Increasing inefficiencies of the bus system due to house-to house pickups of students, many living within walking distance, were noted by the Principal. Clearly the Peru Elementary is an example of a school setting that offers great promise for increased walking and biking. Parents in the community have a high rate of willingness to allow older elementary school children to walk and bike. Several key safety, infrastructure and enforcement areas have been identified in our surveys and meetings and will need to be addressed:

- traffic speed, (especially trucks) on Main Street in the immediate vicinity of the school – given the lack of enforcement personnel in this rural setting patrolled mainly by the County Sheriff, improved street design and traffic calming/speed management techniques are essential

- the crossing of Route 108
- additional paved shoulders and/or sidewalks in the school vicinity

The school's current high rate of walking and biking, survey results indicating parental support for improvements, and the high rate of students living within a walkable distance to the school make it worthy of additional Safe Ways efforts. The school is also in the process of applying for State funds for renovation/expansion and has an administration that has supported this study and sees the benefits to improving non-vehicular access to the school. In addition, improvements in walking/biking rates have been identified as having a possible parallel benefit in reducing bus travel times, stops and costs.

### **Challenges:**

The major challenges to biking and walking to school in Peru are Main St. with its high percentage of truck traffic and the challenge of adding paved shoulders and sidewalks to a rural road. The other challenge is the Rt. 108/Main St. intersection that does not warrant a traffic signal.

### **Recommendations:**

Walking School bus programs could be implemented from Doloff Street neighborhood and Main St. and Pleasant St. neighborhoods south of the school. At Rt. 108 and Main St., an "Intersection Ahead" sign with flashing beacons should be installed on Rt. 108 west of the intersection. Walkers from Doloff St. should be encouraged to use the crosswalk 50' to the east of the intersection which provides better sight distance. On Main St. near the school, traffic calming measures should be considered along with sidewalks or a paved shoulder. "15 mph School Zone" signs could also be installed by the Town.